

Foster 

VC Kids

21st Century Caregiving :

**Foster VC Kids Resource Family Training
Session 7**

Day Seven Learning Objectives

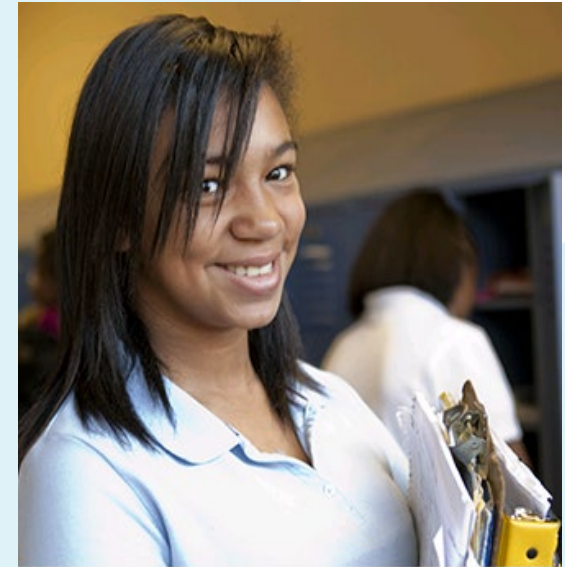
- ▶ Foster Children's **educational rights** and why these are important.
- ▶ Resource family **responsibilities** related to meeting a child's educational needs.
- ▶ The **importance of school stability** for children in the foster care system.
- ▶ Educational **resources available to children** and their families.
- ▶ Identify **the feelings a child may experience during transitions** and determine how to help the child manage these feelings in order to achieve successful transition.
- ▶ Identify **the feelings you and your family may experience during transitions** of a foster child into and out of your home and determine how you may manage these feelings in order to achieve successful transition.
- ▶ Identify **the types of transitions** a child in the foster care system may experience on his/her personal journey towards permanency.
- ▶ Utilize an **eco-map to identify connections and analyze support systems** which can help through the transition process.
- ▶ Apply what you have learned about the foster care process as you **welcome a new child into your home.**



Educational Rights of Children in Foster Care

There is legislation that protect foster child's education rights to ensure that education services are being provided and that the child's needs are being met.

- ▶ **AB 490** allows for foster children to be **immediately enrolled in school**, to be **maintained in their school** placements, given **access to the same resources**, to be placed in the **least restrictive educational setting** and that **all education decisions are in the best interest** in the child. This also mandates schools to assign a foster youth liaison to support compliance with the law.
- ▶ **AB 216** allows school districts to make **exceptions to graduation requirements** to ease the path to graduation for youth who have moved schools and lost credits.
- ▶ Always **contact the Ventura County Office of Education Foster Youth Services** program if you have any questions or concerns.



Educational Responsibilities for Resource Families

- ▶ **Maintain the School of Origin, whenever possible. Extra funding is available in some situations.**
- ▶ Consult with social workers before making any school changes.
- ▶ Work with the child's educational team to access assessments and services. This includes the educational rights holder, which may be the birth parents or an appointed surrogate.
- ▶ Participate in school related meetings, events, and activities.
- ▶ Encourage the child's participation in school, clubs, sports and other school related extracurricular activities.
- ▶ Assist with homework and school projects.



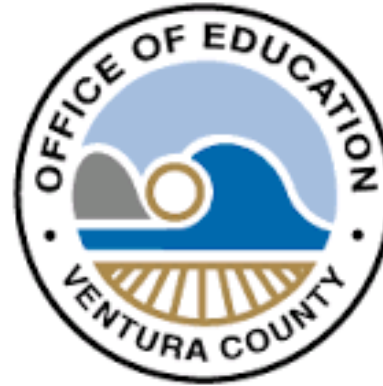
The Importance of School Stability

- ▶ **Students in foster care move schools at least once or twice a year.**
- ▶ By the time they age out of the system, over 1/3 will have experiences 5 or more school moves.
- ▶ Children are estimated to lose 4-6 months of academic progress per move.
- ▶ School transfers decrease the chances of high school graduation. Only 54% of aged-out foster youths received their diplomas.
- ▶ 50% of adolescents aging out of foster care and juvenile justice systems will be homeless within 6 months.
- ▶ Over 50% of aged out foster youth are unemployed.
- ▶ This not only speaks to the importance of school stability but also the critical importance of life long connections to support youth through their transitions into adulthood.



Educational Resources

- ▶ 504 Plans
- ▶ Individualized Educational Plans (IEP)
- ▶ Special Education Programs and Services
- ▶ Early Start Services
- ▶ Low-cost and free online tutoring and career guidance through www.ifoster.org
- ▶ Advocacy and Support through the VCOE Foster Youth Services Program.



Attachment and Loss

Attachment

To become attached, a child will:

- ▶ Take risks
- ▶ Allow themselves to depend on someone else
- ▶ Build a safe zone

Loss

To have losses means a child will experience:

- ▶ Loss of control
- ▶ Loss of the familiar
- ▶ Traumatic loss, even if there is also relief
- ▶ Loss of things and belongings
- ▶ Loss of routines

Effects on Physical and Psychological Development

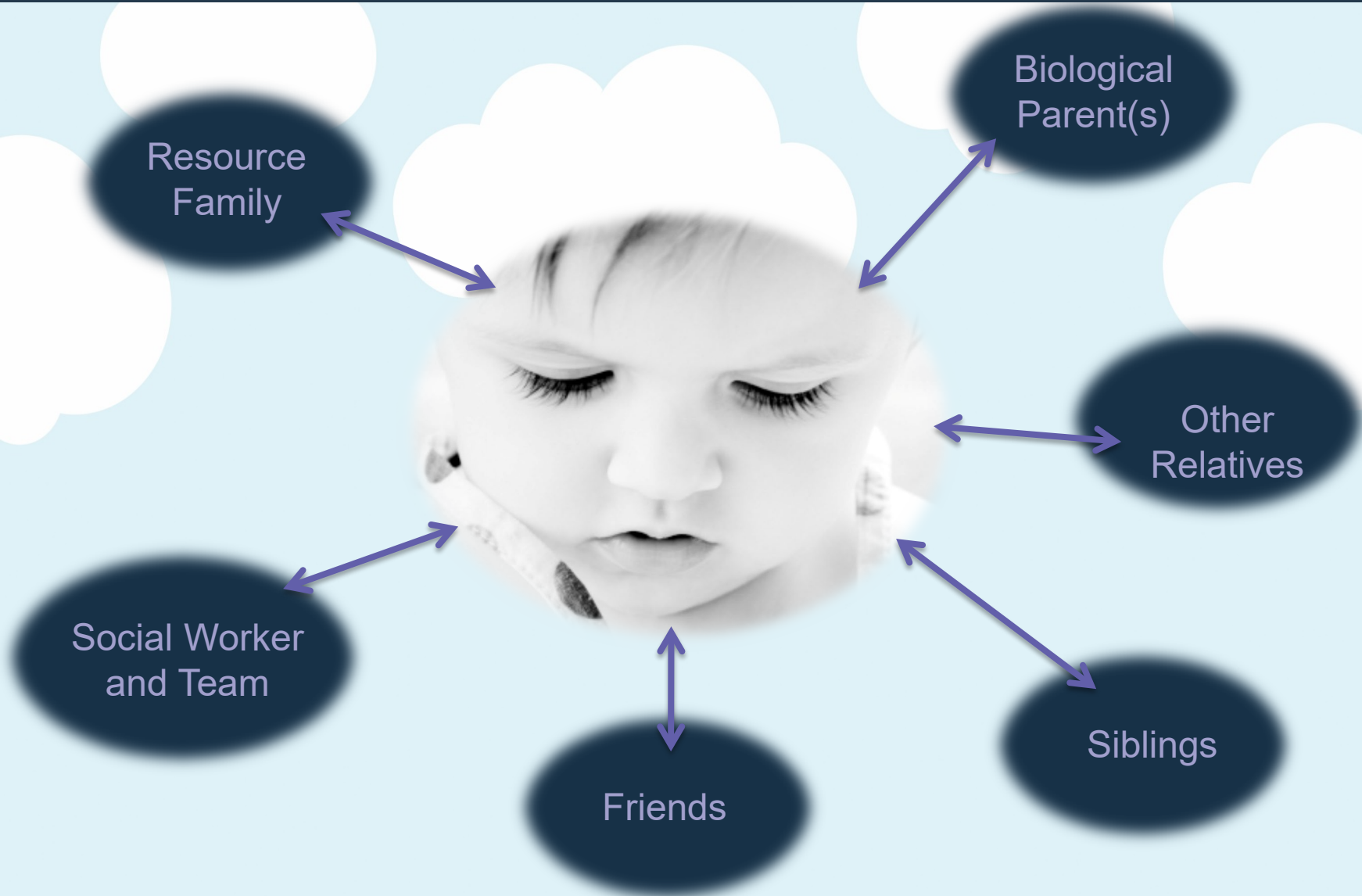
Children who have survived trauma often find it difficult to:

- ▶ Trust other people
- ▶ Feel safe
- ▶ Understand and manage their emotions
- ▶ Adjust and respond to life's changes
- ▶ Physically and emotionally adapt to stress



Repeated traumatic experiences, particularly in very young children and especially those at the hands of caregivers, can actually alter crucial pathways in the developing brain.

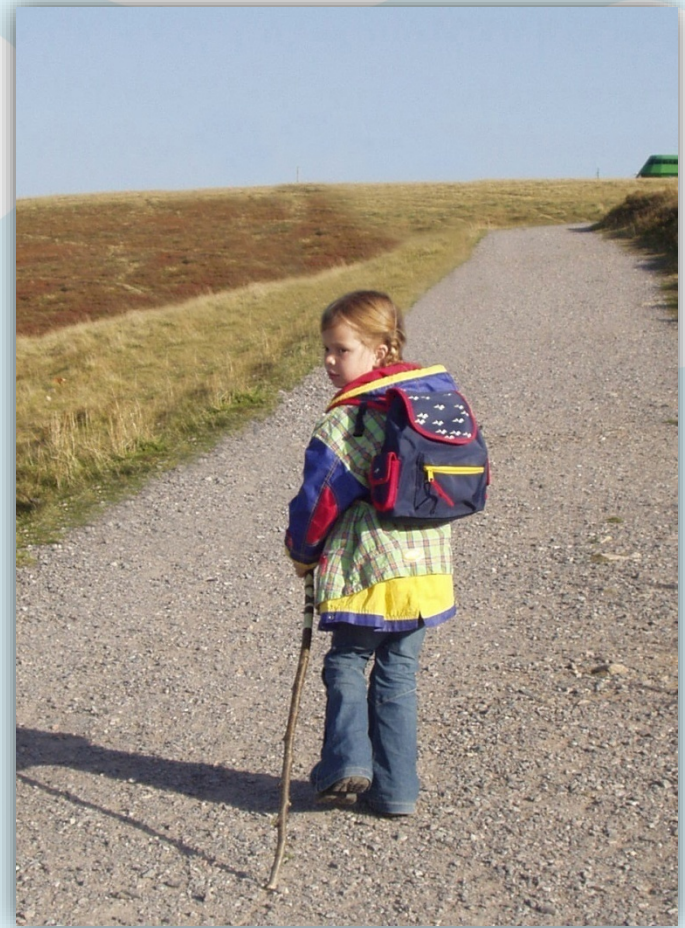
Connections & Attachment



Loss: What Will It Mean to Leave Now?

When the child's experience in your home comes to an end, the child will experience loss. This loss will mean:

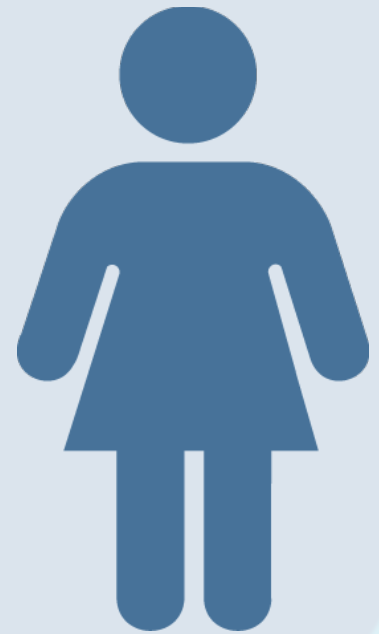
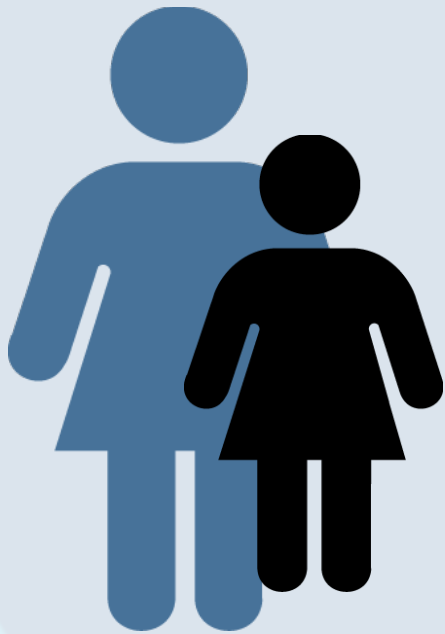
- ▶ Loss of the resource family
- ▶ Change in routine
- ▶ Possible loss of safety depending on the transition
- ▶ Move into the unknown
- ▶ Putting themselves out there again



Resource Family = Transition-Maker

At its core, the job as a resource family is to prepare a child for transition.

- ▶ Providing a **loving and safe home**
- ▶ Being a **sensitive and responsive caregiver**
- ▶ Helping the child develop his/her own **strategies for resilience** as well as building **skills in self-regulation, self-control, social interaction, and cognition**
- ▶ Helping the child **prepare for the future**
- ▶ Supporting **connections and relationships**



Creating a Good Transition



Talking with
children
about the
changes that
occur with
transition



Helping
children
understand
their own
history



Helping
children
adjust to
losses



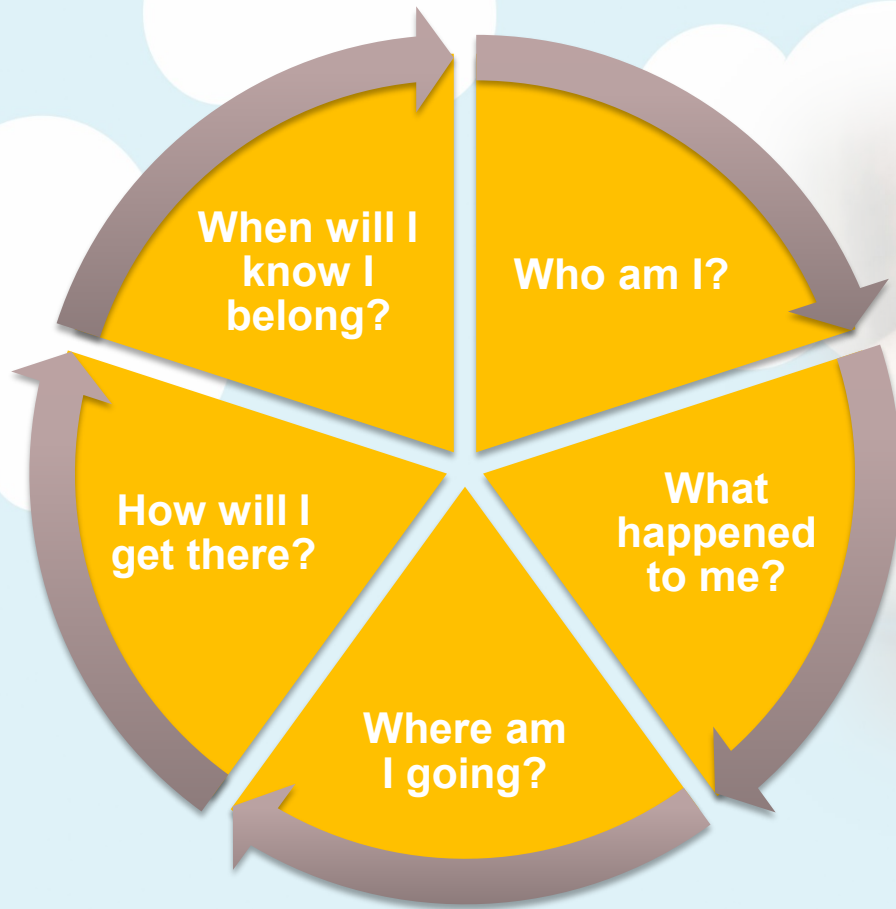
Talking with Children About the Changes



▶ To make the conversation beneficial for the child:

- Plan the discussion
- Help the child talk about the perceived difference in his own words
- Help the child draw analogies to something in his/her own life
- Manage your own losses
- Involve the team

Helping Children Understand Their Own History



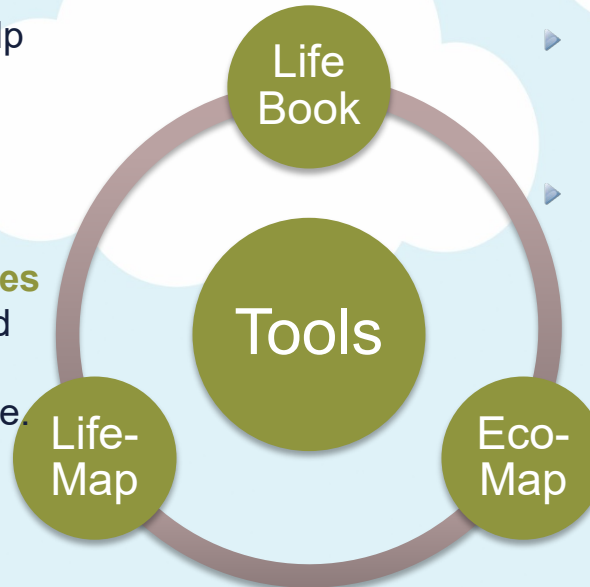
Help children review and understand their previous life experiences to **clarify what happened to them in the past** and help them **integrate those experiences** so they will have **greater self-understanding**.



Talking with Children About the Changes

A Life-Map (or Life-Path):

- ▶ **A visual representation** to help children understand the paths their lives have taken and the decision points along the way.
- ▶ They may have **stepping stones to represent a child's age** and a statement about where and with whom they lived at that age.



A Lifebook:

- ▶ **An account of the child's life** in words, pictures, photographs, and documents.
- ▶ Resource Families can assist in creating a lifebook for a child **by gathering information about a child and taking pictures** of people and places that are—or were—important to the child.

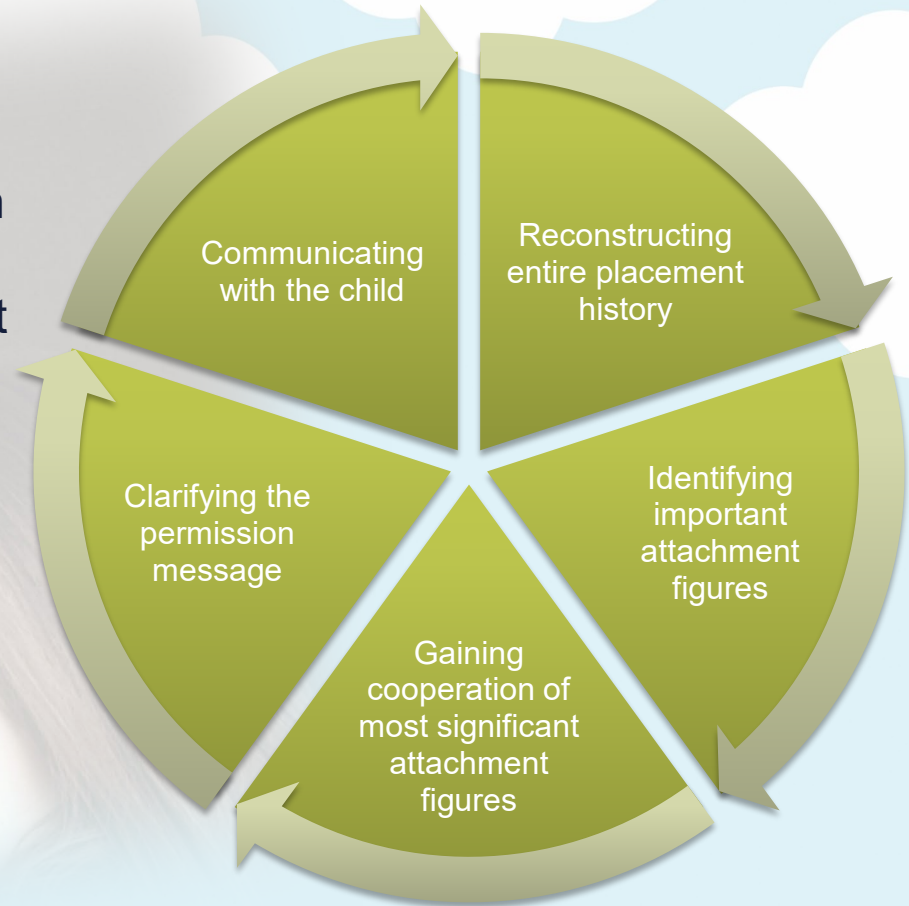
An Eco-Map:

- ▶ **A visual representation of a person** and the important people and activities in his or her life.
- ▶ A child's eco-map may **have a circle in the middle of the page with a stick figure of a child**, along with the question "Why am I here?"
- ▶ **Lines are drawn out from the circle like spokes to other circles** representing the court, other foster families, siblings, school, or to other topics such as "things I like to do"
- ▶ **Visually represent what and who is important to a child** and to help the child understand how he or she came to live with the resource family.

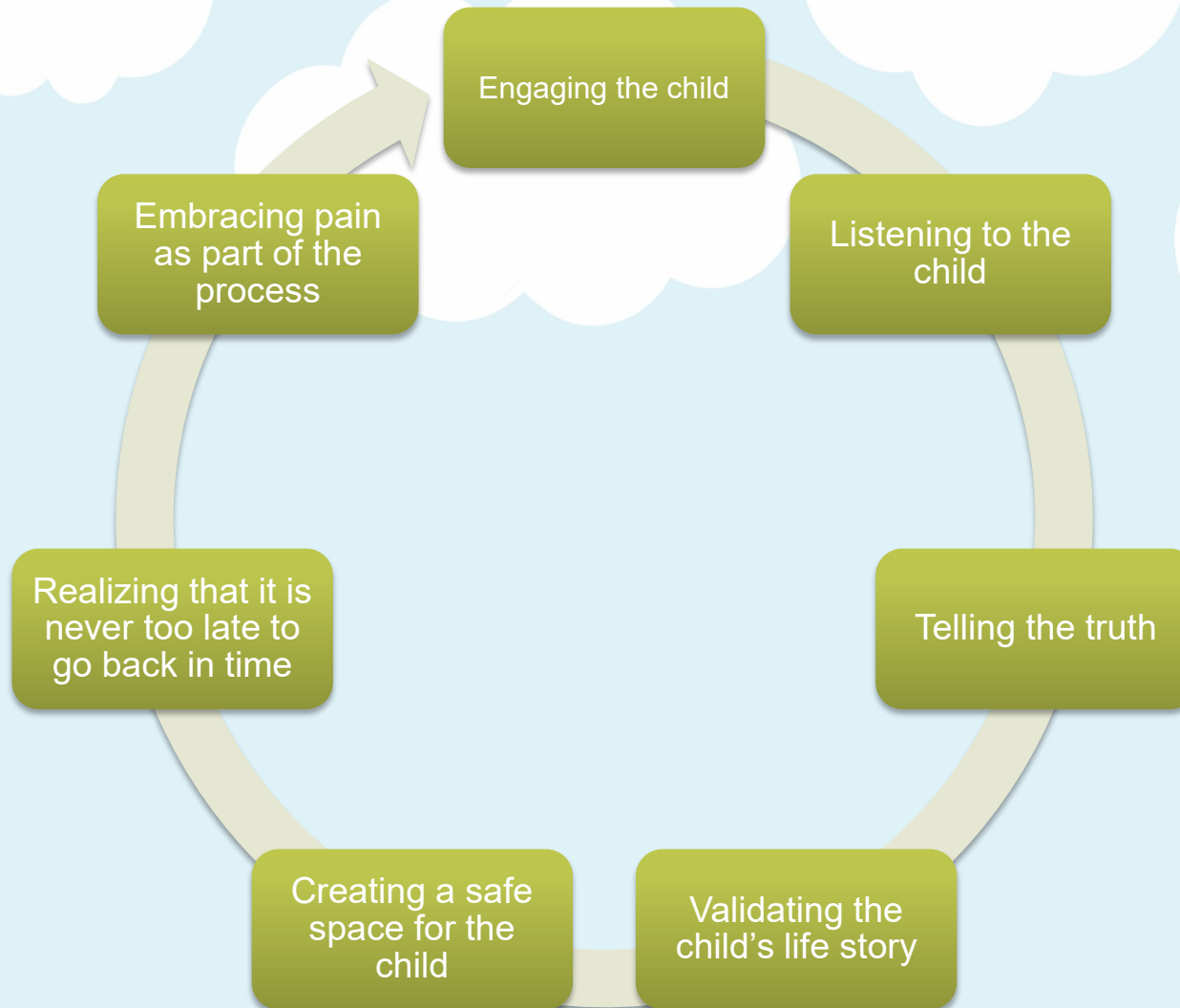
Helping Children Adjust to Losses

It is important to **help children integrate their previous attachments** to important people in their lives in order to be able to transition that emotional attachment to a new family.

Integration is a way of **helping children cope with the painful realities of the separation from their biological families** that often impact their future behaviors and can create extraordinary stress between them and their foster/adoptive parents.



Helping Children Adjust to Losses: Skills to Use in Integration



Types of Transitions

Reunification...



Relative Placement...



Independent Living...



Transition Back to Biological Parent(s) – Reunification

While an exciting time for all, it may also create some tension or anxiety:

- ▶ Children may wonder if the parent has really changed or if change will last
- ▶ Children may regress in placement due to anxiety
- ▶ Children may want to reject resource family first to show loyalty to family or to avoid their feelings
- ▶ Emotions may run high when reunification is planned and is not immediate



Transition Back to Biological Parent

Birdy



Birdy, her dad, and her team worked hard to help her move into recovery for the trauma of her sexual abuse and struggles with self-harm and depression/anxiety.

Her journey to healing inspired her dad, and the two made phenomenal progress in their respective treatments. Six months later, Birdy's dad is living in an apartment, working, and actively participating in aftercare for his rehabilitation program. Birdy has opened up in the family and has also been able to have visits with her dad with increasing autonomy.

At the permanency hearing, the judge determines that as soon as the providers involved with Birdy and her dad deem them stable enough, Birdy can return to her dad's care. This move will not be immediate, however.

In response to the news, Birdy returns home and packs. She then shuts out the family emotionally and spends her days waiting for the therapists to give the judge approval for reunification.

Transition to Relative Placement

Sometimes relatives will come forward during the placement experience. This can be stressful for several reasons:

- ▶ The child may not know the relative very well
- ▶ Resource Families must work with a new partner on the team
- ▶ The transition may happen suddenly and without warning



Transition Back to Relative Placement/Guardianship

Jessamyn



Jessamyn dad's aunt met her at the hospital, has been trying to convince the dad to seek custody, or enter a reunification plan.

When Jessamyn's dad will not become involved, his aunt Margaret finally goes against her nephew's wishes and petitions for relative caregiver custody. Since she is a nurse and can provide medical care, she is approved.

You are ordered to return the child immediately. You and your family are devastated: you were supportive of her mom but thought you would have her for longer.

In addition to your deep attachment to Jessamyn, you have recently booked a 7-day cruise, and you purchased a ticket for Jessamyn, having asked for permission from the court for the cruise prior to Margaret's petition.

**Disruptions often
occur when foster**

**parents request the removal of a child
into another foster placement. This can**

happen when a resource family has

discovered a deal breaker that they did not

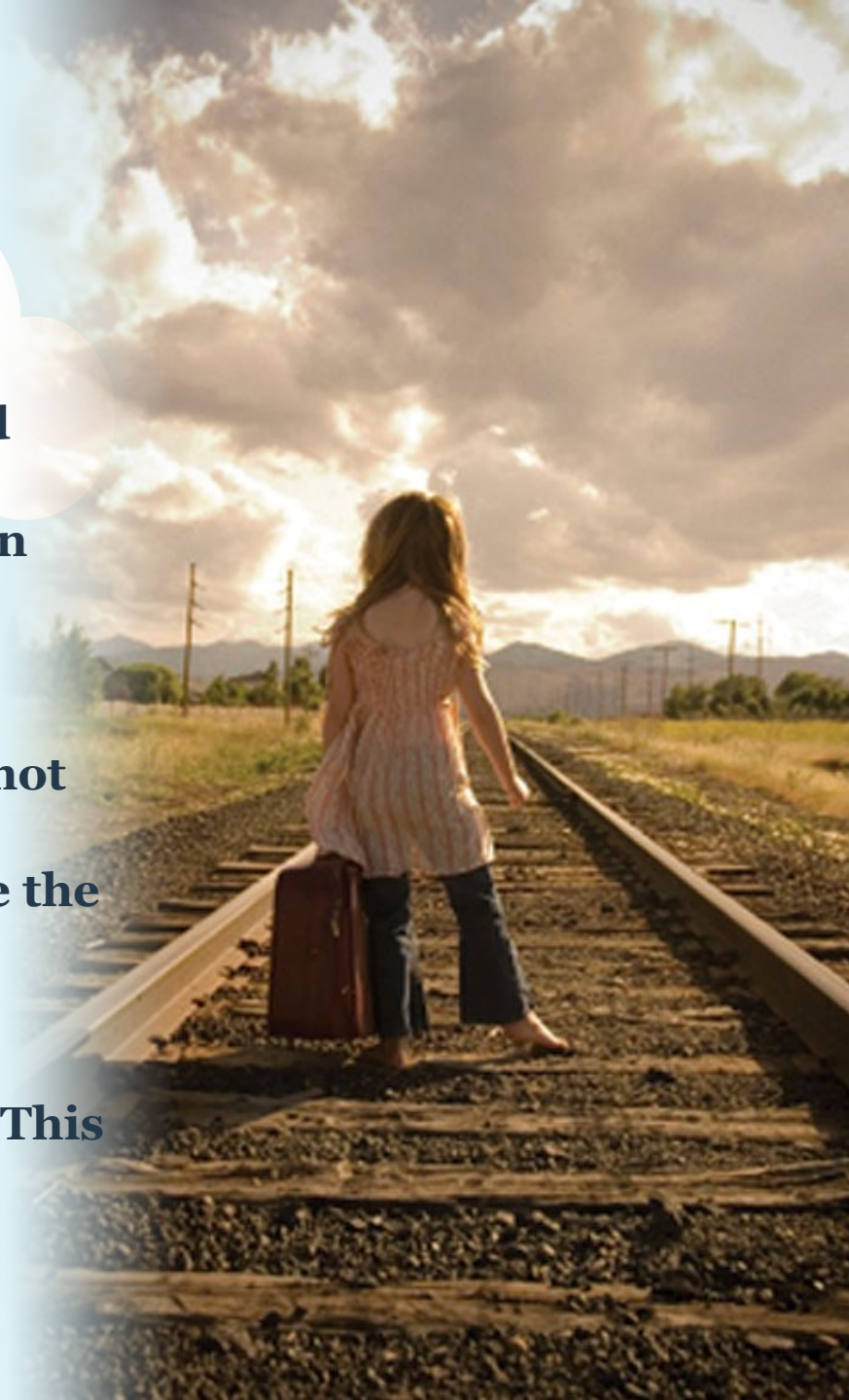
know existed or they feel they do not have the

skills to care

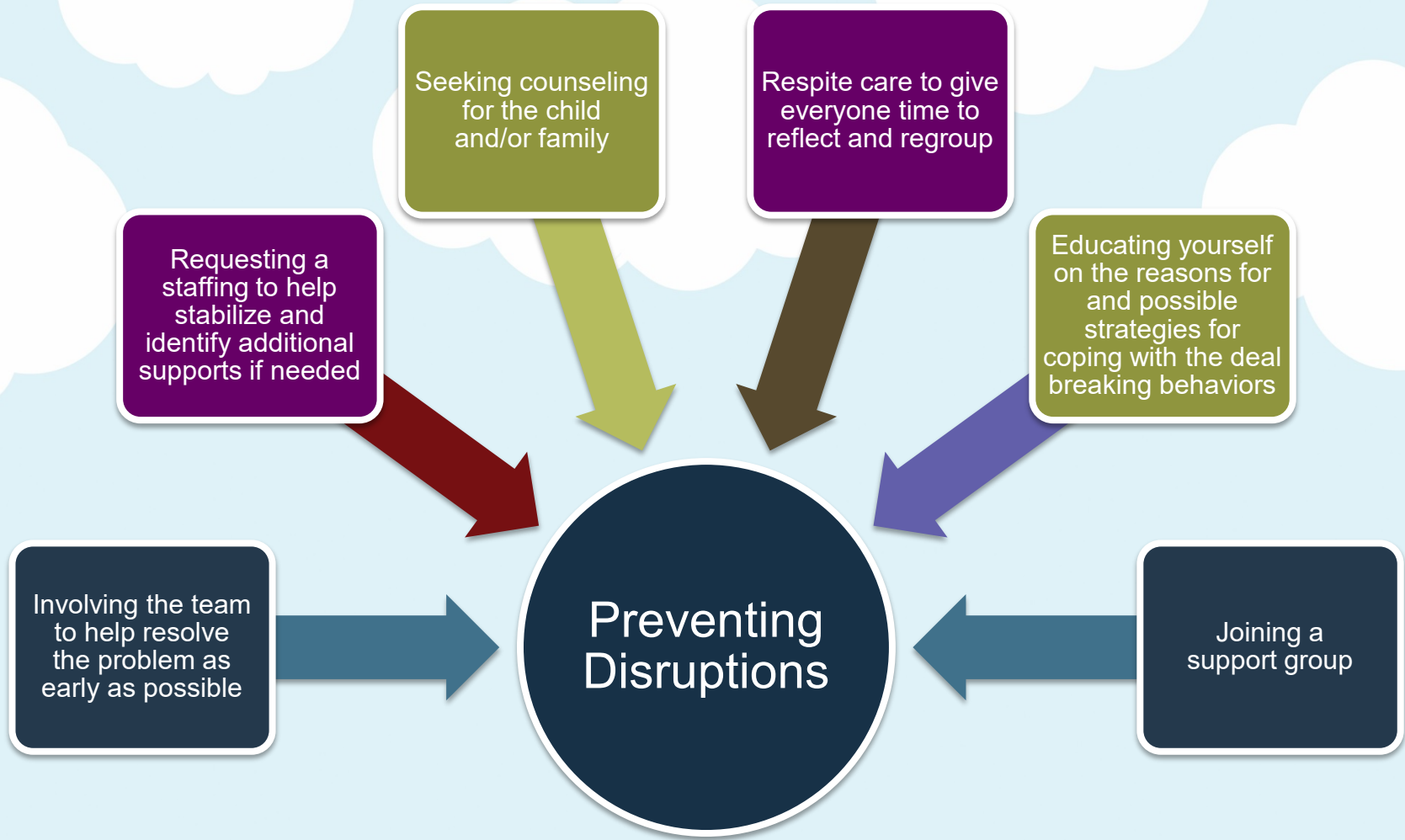
for a child's emotional or physical needs. This

decision must be taken seriously

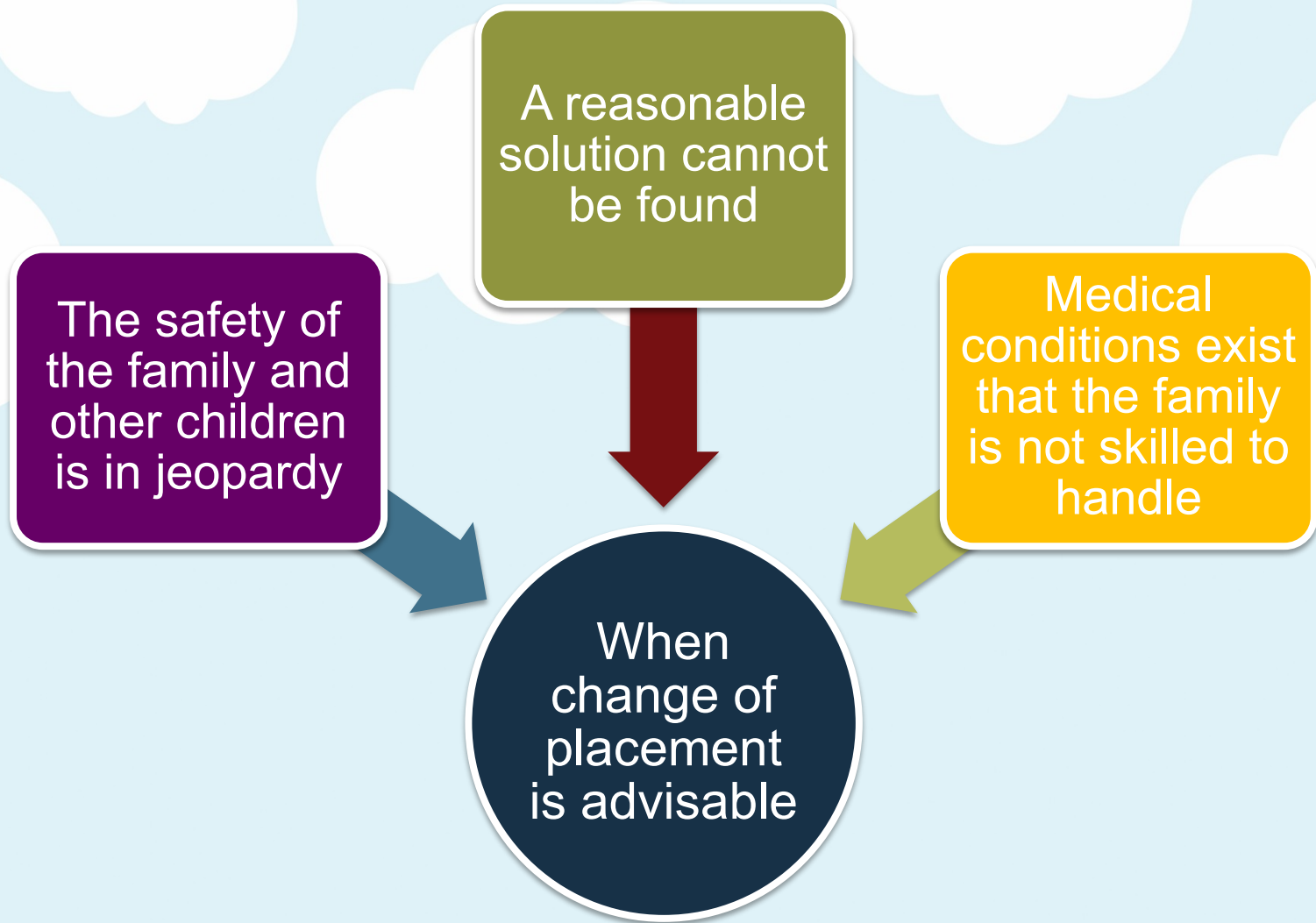
with careful thought and planning!



Preventing Disruptions



When Disruption Does Occur



Disruption Due to New Placement

Miguel



Miguel has continued to struggle with his behavior in school. Most recently, he was accused of initiating sexual activity with another boy in the bathroom and was suspended from school.

Upon being suspended, he was returned to the home and had a two hour tantrum, during which he defecated in his clothing and scratched himself and attacked you. You sent your own child to her room (Marisol and Ibiza were in school and day care), and called the social worker.

It was determined that Miguel needed an evaluation and was hospitalized for threats to self and others. The evaluator was concerned about sexually aggressive behavior as well as a strong traumatic response that could be made worse by a family predisposition to mental illness.

Miguel is in the psychiatric hospital, and may be discharged to a more restrictive, specialized setting.



When a youth turns 18, he/she is officially an adult. At this time the youth may choose to leave the foster care system or participate in AB 12 Extended Foster Care Services through his/her 21st birthday. Regardless, a strong transition plan that includes adult supporters should be in place. Without a plan for support, foster youth face great challenges as they enter adulthood.

Transition to Independent Living: The Resource Family's Role

Just as you would send your own child off to college as prepared as possible, your job is **to help the foster youth prepare for the transition to independence**. Some of the things you can do include:

- ▶ Supporting the youth in developing skills in self-sufficiency when he/she is still living with you.
- ▶ Helping the youth gather important documents and keeping these documents up-to-date.
- ▶ Helping the youth gather important information and providing support and guidance with that information.
- ▶ Continuing to be a support and a connection after the child has left your home.



Helping Your Family Through Transitions: Loss

You can develop some strategies that will help you prepare to let go.

These include:

- ▶ Keeping a record of the child from the first day including photos, memorabilia (this is good for you too)
- ▶ Acknowledging that a child's fear is greater than your own
- ▶ Knowing you did your best for the child will help you with your own grief

You can help prepare for the separation in advance by:

- ▶ Working with the biological family as much as you can so you can ALL feel a sense of continuity and connection
- ▶ Reaching out, through visitation, conversations, letters, phone calls and emails, to the new family to help the transition and to build connections
- ▶ Reaching out to the team when you and your family members need extra support
- ▶ Sharing your grief with your partner, the biological parent(s), children, and team

Activity



**Welcoming a
New Child Into
Your Home**

End of Day Seven

**Thank you
for participating.**

